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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ Twitter To Censor Tweets ~ People Are Talking! ~ Disable pcAnywhere!
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, SOPA and PIPA are dead in the water, or at most, treading water hoping someone will throw either a life buoy! More than likely, both bills have returned to their sources for re-writes and attempts at compromises. I seriously don't think that the politicians are done with either of these bills. And, waiting in the wings is another bill, ACTA. Some have said that ACTA is more dangerous than either SOPA or PIPA. Follow that story elsewhere in this week's issue!

We're still managing to survive this year's winter, finally one which has been relatively uneventful. Cold temps, but nothing more than a couple bouts of a dusting of snow. And nothing still on the ground! I have no complaints so far, and hoping that nothing changes drastically to change these events. We've earned a quiet winter for a change!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - New Xbox To Be 6 Times As Powerful As The Xbox 360!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Nintendo Chief Promises To Do Wii U Launch Right!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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New Xbox Said To Be Six Times As Powerful As The Xbox 360

Will Microsoft’s next machine blow its current console out of the water?

The current video game console generation is entering its twilight years, and with that inevitability comes the unceasing rumors of what each company’s next hardware will be capable of. Nintendo has already shown its hand by unveiling the Wii U, and now some tasty tidbits are beginning to surface regarding the next Xbox from Microsoft. Popularly nicknamed the Xbox 720, some new, well-sourced rumors suggest that it will be six times as powerful as the current console.

The Xbox 360 is no slouch, and it can still play host to the hottest new releases, but the hardware is approaching its 6th birthday and some serious advancements have been made in the world of graphics processing in the last half decade. The new Xbox will reportedly run on a derivative of AMD’s 6670 graphics chip, which supports 1080p HD, 3D, and linking to multiple external displays.

Compared to the Wii U, the Xbox 720 should be roughly 20% more powerful, though the stats of the two systems appear to be close enough that players may not notice a difference. Like Microsoft, Sony has yet to officially reveal anything about its followup to the PlayStation 3, but based on their console release history, a new machine is undoubtedly in the works. Where the PlayStation 4 will stack up in comparison to the new systems by Nintendo and Microsoft is anyone’s guess.

Nintendo Chief Promises To Do Wii U Launch Right

Nintendo’s chief is determined to get right the launch of its next game machine, Wii U, set for this year’s holiday shopping season, and acknowledged Friday some mistakes with selling its 3DS handheld.

But Nintendo Co. President Satoru Iwata warned earnings for the fiscal year set to begin April will be the toughest ever for the Japanese manufacturer behind the Super Mario and Pokemon games.

Iwata’s remarks come a day after it lowered its annual earnings forecast to a 65 billion yen ($844 million) loss, much larger than the 20 billion yen ($260 million) loss projected earlier. It posted a 77.62 billion yen profit the previous fiscal year.

Iwata blamed the strong yen, which erases overseas earnings, as well as the arrival of smartphones and other devices that offer gaming.

The higher yen slashed nearly 54 billion yen ($701 million) from the company’s operating profit for the April-December period.

"I can see how the red ink may be perceived as abnormal," Iwata told analysts and reporters at a Tokyo hotel. "The environment has changed."

The failure of the 3DS handheld, which offers three-dimensional imagery, to take off with enough momentum during the last quarter of 2011 was one of the main reasons for the dismal results, according to Iwata.

The 3DS has gradually started to sell better, but it took a price cut in August. It still lacks a strong lineup of attractive software games, a key factor for a machine to succeed in a big way.

Iwata vowed the company will be better prepared when it introduces the Wii U home console during the 2012 year-end shopping season for a strong comeback.

He declined to give details such as pricing or what the software games available at that time might be.

But he said the Wii U will come with a strong game lineup at the launch as well as secure and safe Internet services that will offer players individual accounts.

The Wii U will come with new ways of playing that will almost make the term "home console" obsolete, Iwata said. It will also offer mobile gaming. The machine has a touch-panel controller.

Nintendo has long competed against rival game makers, such as Sony Corp. and Microsoft Corp. These days, all face the threat from hit devices like the iPad and iPhone from Apple Inc. that also offer games.

Iwata's comments also showed Nintendo is growing less cautious about the Internet, which in the past it had brushed off as mainly for hard-core gamers.

Kyoto-based Nintendo has built its reputation on making games fun to play for casual and newcomer players.

"We are going to put to use our bitter experience with the 3DS," said Iwata.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

ACTA 'Is More Dangerous Than SOPA'

SOPA and PIPA are stalled (or dead) in the halls of the U.S. Congress. Yet, there may be a bigger, perhaps more dangerous threat to Internet freedoms on the way, called the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement, or ACTA. At least that's how U.S. Congressman Darrell Issa sees it, telling an audience, "As a member of Congress, it's more dangerous than SOPA. It's not coming to me for a vote. It purports that it does not change existing laws. But once implemented, it creates a whole new enforcement system and will virtually tie the hands of Congress to undo it."

The stunning declaration came during what was actually an upbeat panel discussion at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The convo, part of Mashable's Documented@Davos program at the WEF, featured California Congressman Issa (R), Wikipedia Founder Jimmy Wales, Google SVP and Chief Legal Officer David Drummond, Scribd Cofounder and CEO Trip Adler, and Mashable CEO Pete Cashmore.

Congress’s inability to change ACTA, Issa added, is "what makes ACTA very dangerous. It sounded probably to people like a good idea, but people should ask, why did they work around the WTO [World Trade Organization] and all the existing bodies? I think the answer is: They could work in secret. They could get it done, and then they could tell people you couldn’t change it."

Unlike SOPA, (Issa called it "radioactive") and PIPA, which are bills in Congress, ACTA is a more far-reaching, global treaty that seeks to normalize copyright protection and intellectual property standards across participating nations. It even addresses offline issues like counterfeit pharmaceuticals.

ACTA already has significant support. Signers include Poland, France, Italy, Japan, Singapore, Switzerland, South Korea and, yes, the U.S. (it signed last year). While it’s unclear if ACTA shares the same "draconian" enforcement measures, Issa said, "Many of the things in SOPA are basically implied in ACTA."

If the movement against ACTA, which is gathering steam in countries such as Poland, takes off, the anti-SOPA protest may provide the blueprint for a wide-scale counteroffensive. Prior to the SOPA and PIPA protests, the panelist noted, the tech community had only informally lobbied Washington on issues like education, visas and other items not necessarily closely related to technology. However, the game changed with SOPA. The relatively young tech community, which, as Google’s Drummond noted, does not have the political organization or clout of, say, an older industry like Hollywood, transitioned from sending letters to Congress to taking direct action, and taking the issue directly to their site visitors and customers. Drummond said the Web community now may have "the prospects of a lasting coalition that will give us a bigger voice in Washington."

During the panel, Wikipedia s Wales described how the community-sourced online encyclopedia made the decision to protest SOPA by going dark. He noticed in early December 2011 that "SOPA seemed to be on a fast track. Was really being pushed through and not a lot was being done to stop it." The possibility of a Wikipedia protest was discussed and decided by the community. "In the end, we held a vote, and 87% were in favor," recalled Wales. It was a dramatic act soon followed by many other online destinations. As Congressman Issa sees it, this was the right approach.

"I don t want to understate the importance of money, I think everyone gets that that’s part of the process of politics at all levels. But ...a broad coalition is more powerful than any amount of money." Issa believes his fellow congressmen may now think twice before supporting similar legislation, "The next time the content community comes with a pre-packaged bill that they’ve written, every office is going to say, ’And how does the tech community feel about it?’ " Issa told the panel.

Issa has sponsored another piece of online legislation known as the Online Protection & ENforcement of Digital Trade Act or OPEN Act, which has found some support among Facebook and Google, two Internet companies that opposed SOPA and PIPA.

No one is denying the issues of copyright infringement and content piracy remain, but Scribd’s Trip Adler, who said his site "wouldn’t be able to exist if SOPA was in place," thinks it s time to take a different approach. "We can innovate our way to a solution that’s good for the users, good for the Internet and good for content owners," he said. Google’s

Drummond agreed, "There are ways to deal with these problems with technology and being smart about it where we don't actually have to have legislation."

While panelists talked about what they saw as the relatively secrecy under which ACTA was authored, ACTA is by no means a new initiative. Posts about the act started emerging online as early as 2008 (the initiation began with the U.S. and Japan in 2006). Canada's Foreign Affairs and International Trade site offers a comprehensive look at the act, and even tackles the claim that ACTA was built and ratified in secret:

"This process has not been kept from the public. On October 23, 2007, the partners involved in ACTA at that time publicly announced that they had initiated preliminary discussions on ACTA. Several countries involved in ACTA have conducted public consultations on the key proposed elements of the ACTA."

One thing is clear: The temperature is finally rising for ACTA, and at least one Congressman now publicly sees it as a greater threat than SOPA. You can see the entire panel in the exclusive video above.

U.S. Cybersecurity Efforts Trigger Privacy Concerns

The federal government's plan to expand computer security protections into critical parts of private industry is raising concerns that the move will threaten Americans' civil liberties.

In a report for release Friday, The Constitution Project warns that as the Obama administration partners more with the energy, financial, communications and health care industries to monitor and protect networks, sensitive personal information of people who work for or communicate with those companies could be improperly or inadvertently disclosed.

While the government may have good intentions, it "runs the risk of establishing a program akin to wiretapping all network users' communications," the nonpartisan legal think tank says. The Associated Press obtained a copy of the report in advance.

Cybersecurity has become a rapidly expanding priority for the government as federal agencies, private companies and everyday people come under persistent and increasingly sophisticated computer attacks. The threat is diverse, ranging from computer hackers going after banking and financial accounts to terrorists or other nations breaching government networks to steal sensitive data or sabotage critical systems such as the electrical grid, nuclear plants or Wall Street.

Privacy has been a hotly debated issue, particularly as the Pentagon broadens its pilot program to help defense contractors protect their networks and ystems. Several companies, including critical jet fighter and drone programs, have been attacked, although the Pentagon has said that no classified information was lost.

And there are plans for the Homeland Security Department to use the defense program as a model to prevent hackers and hostile nations from breaching critical infrastructure. Officials have suggested that Congress needs to craft legislation that would protect companies from certain privacy and other laws in order to share information with the government

for cybersecurity purposes.

DHS spokesman Matt Chandler said the legislative proposals reflect the administration’s commitment to privacy protections and contain standards to minimize contact with personal information while dealing with cybersecurity threats. "DHS builds strong privacy protections into the core of all cybersecurity programs and initiatives," Chandler said, adding that the agency realizes that providing assistance to private companies is a sensitive task that requires "trust and strict confidentiality."

The Constitution Project report recommends that officials limit the amount and nature of personal information shared between the public and private sectors. And it calls for strict oversight of the cyber programs by Congress and independent audits, to ensure that privacy rights have not been violated.

"The government should not be permitted to conduct an end-run around Fourth Amendment safeguards by relying upon private companies to monitor networks," it said.

In addition, the report raised concerns about the ongoing development of the Einstein 3 program, a government network monitoring system that would both detect and take action against cyberattacks on federal systems. DHS officials have said that extensive privacy protections are in place.

But the report expressed concerns that as DHS and the secretive National Security Agency share information about potential computer-based threats, the NSA could review communications from U.S. individuals without setting up privacy safeguards.

"With more and more people needing to share sensitive personal and financial data over the Internet, it is absolutely vital that, while we are looking to protect our networks against cyberattack, we also preserve our constitutionally guaranteed rights to privacy," said Constitution Project committee member Asa Hutchinson, a former DHS undersecretary who also served as a GOP congressman from Arkansas.

Lawmakers who have been wrestling with these issues over the past several years have several bills in the works, and most include some privacy provisions.

Twitter To Restrict User Content in Some Countries

Twitter announced Thursday that it would begin restricting Tweets in specific countries, renewing questions about how the social media platform will handle issues of free speech as it rapidly expands its global user base.

Until now, Twitter had to remove a Tweet from its global network if it received a takedown request from a government. But the company said in a blog post published Thursday that it now has the ability to selectively block a Tweet from appearing to users in one country.

"Starting today, we give ourselves the ability to reactively withhold content from users in a specific country while keeping it available in the rest of the world," the Twitter blog said.

Twitter gave as examples of restrictions it might cooperate with, such as "pro-Nazi content" in France and Germany, where it is banned.

It said even with the possibility of such restrictions, Twitter would not be able to coexist with some countries. "Some differ so much from our ideas that we will not be able to exist there," it said.

"As we continue to grow internationally, we will enter countries that have different ideas about the contours of freedom of expression," Twitter wrote.

In the interest of transparency, Twitter said, it has built a mechanism to inform users in the event that a Tweet is being blocked.

A Twitter spokeswoman declined to elaborate on the blog.

Twitter’s acknowledgement that it will censor content represents a significant departure from its tone just one year ago, when anti-government protesters in Tunisia, Egypt and other Arab countries coordinated mass demonstrations on the social network and, in the process, thrust Twitter’s disruptive potential into the global spotlight.

As the revolutions brewed last January, Twitter signaled that it would take a hands-off approach to censoring content in a blog post entitled "The Tweets Must Flow."

"We do not remove Tweets on the basis of their content," the blog post read. "Our position on freedom of expression carries with it a mandate to protect our users’ right to speak freely and preserve their ability to contest having their private information revealed."

And last year, Twitter General Counsel Alex Macgillivray declared that the company was "from the free speech wing of the free speech party."

Still, some open Internet advocates said it appeared Twitter did the best it could to navigate the dueling responsibilities of complying with local law and upholding free speech.

Twitter would be banned outright in many countries if it did not agree to restrict Tweets, said Cynthia Wong of the Center for Technology & Democracy.

"The question is: What’s best for freedom of speech?" Wong said. "If Twitter was completely blocked from certain countries, is that really better? It looks like Twitter has done a good job in thinking through how to mitigate the human rights harm in complying with local law."

Twitter’s move highlighted the frequent tensions over freedom of speech and privacy issues between foreign governments and Internet companies such as Google and Facebook as they expand rapidly overseas.

In 2010 Google relocated its Web search engine to Hong Kong, following a very public spat with the Chinese government over its refusal to bow to Beijing’s Web censorship requirements and a hacking episode that Google said it had traced to China.

Wikipedia Founder Hails Halting of U.S. Piracy Bills

The founder of Wikipedia has hailed the online encyclopedia's role in helping halt U.S. legislation aimed at cracking down on Internet piracy.

Jimmy Wales told The Associated Press in an interview Thursday that the idea to black out Wikipedia's English pages for 24 hours came from the site's volunteer editors, who voted overwhelmingly in favor of the move.

Wales says the two bills that Congress postponed indefinitely last week were "very badly designed, technologically incompetent, and just something that we felt needed to be stopped."

Wikipedia was among a number of sites that argued the Stop Online Piracy Act and the Protect Intellectual Property Act would hurt technological innovation and infringe on free-speech rights.

The Web Reacts to Google s "No Opt Out" Privacy Policy Changes

Google has announced that it will revise its privacy policies to cover wider data use across its range of online products and services.

The changes, which will take effect on March 1, have garnered a huge reaction within the online community.

Many technology blogs are vocally opposed to the new privacy policy because it tracks users actions across 60+ Google products - including YouTube, Gmail, Search and Google+ - and combines this data to create a more informed (read "easier to market to") user profile. There is also no way for users to "opt out" of this type of tracking, complain members of the internet community.

The new policy has been a long time coming, says Gizmodo. Google has "been consistently de-anonymizing you, initially requiring real names with Plus, for example, and then tying your Plus account to your Gmail account. But this is an entirely new level of sharing. And given all of the negative feedback that it had with Google+ privacy issues, it's especially troubling that it would take actions that further erode users' privacy."

"Everything across your screens will be integrated and tracked," lambasted ZDNet before Google jumped in to clarify that "it already has all that data, but it s now integrating that information across products. It s a change in how Google will use the data not what it collects."

While many bloggers are arguing about user tracking and privacy, a separate ZDNet article points out that "[m]any of the same techies who cry foul over these new policies have also been pushing for the development of the semantic web to make it easier to find what we actually need in the trillions of web pages floating around the Internet."

Google argues that the data it collects about users online (and offline) habits will help it to return more accurate search results and a "more intuitive Google experience."

"We can provide reminders that you re going to be late for a meeting based on your location, your calendar and an understanding of what the traffic is like that day," says Alma Whitten, director of Privacy, Product and Engineering at Google. "Or ensure that our spelling suggestions, even for

your friends names, are accurate because you ve typed them before."

People are sharing more and more of their online and offline lives on services like Google+, Facebook and Twitter. More data helps these "free" online services provide relevant suggestions and a better overall experience but also means they can build scarily accurate profiles of their users online activity.

If you don t want your Google+ profile to be associated with your work schedule on Google Calenders and prefer that Google doesn t link your talking dog videos on YouTube with your forward-thinking math presentations in Google Docs, you can always create separate Google accounts for each service. Or you can export your Google data using the company s Data Liberation tools and try your luck with Facebook.

UK Judge: Social Network Sites Differ from Press

The British judge presiding over a wide-ranging inquiry into media ethics and practices has suggested that social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter should be seen differently than traditional publishers.

Lord Justice Brian Leveson said Thursday that there was a distinction between what he described as "pub chatter" between friends on such sites and organizations which publish material for public consumption.

Leveson’s inquiry was set up in the wake of Britain’s phone hacking scandal and has the power to recommend far-reaching changes to the way the country’s media are regulated.

The judge also is considering whether nontraditional forms of media, such as blogs, should be submitted to any eventual new rules.

Symantec Tells Customers To Disable pcAnywhere Software

Symantec Corp took the rare step of advising customers to stop using one of its products, saying its pcAnywhere software for accessing remote PCs is at increased risk of getting hacked after blueprints of that software were stolen.

The announcement is the company’s most direct acknowledgement to date that a 2006 theft of its source code put customers at risk of attack.

Symantec said it was only asking customers to temporarily stop using the product, until it releases an update to the software that will mitigate the risk of an attack.

It acknowledged that some customers would need to continue using the software for "business critical purposes," saying they should make sure they were using the most recent version of the product and "understand the current risks," which include the possibility that hackers could steal data or credentials.

Still, it is highly unusual for a software maker to advise customers to disable a product completely while engineers develop an update to fix

bugs. Companies typically recommend mitigating factors that will reduce the risk of an attack.

"That’s crazy. That’s pretty much unheard of to just say ’Stop using it.’ Especially a vendor as large as Symantec," said H.D. Moore, chief architect of Metasploit, a platform that security experts use to test whether computer systems are vulnerable to attack.

PcAnywhere is a software program that is also bundled with some titles in Symantec’s Altiris line of software for managing corporate PCs, Symantec said in a white paper and note to customers released on its website overnight where it disclosed the warning.

Company spokesman Cris Paden said that Symantec has fewer than 50,000 customers using the stand-alone version of pcAnywhere, which was available for sale on its website for $100 and $200 as of early Wednesday afternoon.

The company last week warned customers of the 2006 theft of the source code, or blueprints, to pcAnywhere and several other titles: Norton Antivirus Corporate Edition, Norton Internet Security, Norton Utilities and Norton GoBack.

It made the announcement after a hacker who goes by the name YamaTough released the source code to its Norton Utilities PC software and had threatened to publish its widely used anti-virus programs. Authorities have yet to apprehend that hacker.

At the time, Paden said that the theft of the code posed no threat as long as customers were using the most recent versions of Symantec’s software, with one exception: users of pcAnywhere might face "a slightly increased security risk."

In the white paper published early on Wednesday morning, the company indicated the situation was more serious.

"At this time, Symantec recommends disabling the product until Symantec releases a final set of software updates that resolve currently known vulnerability risks," it said in the white paper.

The company also reiterated its previous guidance that users of its other software titles were not at heightened risk because of the breach in 2006.

"The code that has been exposed is so old that current out-of-the-box security settings will suffice against any possible threats that might materialize as a result of this incident," it said on its website.

Facebook, Washington State Target Online Spam

Facebook is partnering with Washington state to combat a type of spam called "clickjacking" that is plaguing the social networking site, company and state officials announced Thursday.

Two separate lawsuits were filed in federal courts in California and Washington state against Delaware-based Adscend Media LLC, which officials say is behind the spamming.

"The way we think about it, security is an arms race," Facebook's general counsel, Ted Ullyot, said alongside Washington state Attorney General Rob McKenna at the social media company's Seattle offices. "It's important to stay ahead of spammers and scammers."

In "clickjacking," links on Facebook promising shocking or salacious videos have code embedded in them that spreads the link to the user's page. That makes it seem like the user "liked" the link, with the aim of attracting more clicks from the user's friends. The links eventually lead users to a survey or information from an advertiser.

Adscend Media is spreading spam through misleading and deceptive tactics and has encouraged others to do the same, McKenna's office said.

An email inquiry sent to Adscend was not immediately returned, and an attorney for the company had not yet been listed in federal court records.

Social networking sites are popular targets for spammers because people are more likely to trust and share content that comes from people they know. This makes spam, scams and viruses easy to spread.

Still, Facebook says less than 4 percent of content shared on the site is spam. By comparison, about 74 percent of email is spam, according to security company Symantec Corp., though the bulk of it gets filtered out before reaching someone's inbox.

Facebook has more than 800 million users.

Named in Washington state's lawsuit are Adscend co-owners Jeremy Bash, of West Virginia, and Fehzan Ali, of Texas. The lawsuit says Adscend violated several state laws, as well as the federal CAN-SPAM act, which makes it unlawful to procure or initiate transmission of misleading commercial communication.

McKenna said Adscend has annual revenue of $20 million.

Washington state is the only state partnering with Facebook. The company said it partnered with Washington state because of a history in the state of technology consumer protection.

The attorney general said Washington state has been a leader in technology consumer protection since his predecessor, now Gov. Chris Gregoire, began filing suits against malware and spyware users.

"As spammers adjust their tactics, we adjust ours," McKenna said.

Israel Sets Sights on Next-Generation Internet

Israel is often referred to as "Startup Nation," thanks to its long history of high-tech breakthroughs produced by scrappy little companies. But in one critical area, the speed of Internet connections, Israel has fallen behind other tech-savvy countries.

In the coming months, Israel's state-owned electric company hopes to change this by rolling out a nationwide, high-speed broadband network. Exploiting the small size of the densely populated country, the effort

aims to put Israel at the forefront of the next generation of Internet technology.

Experts say the fiber-optic lines can provide connections of 10 to 100 times current speeds, transforming the way the Internet is used in such areas as entertainment, business and health care.

"All the developing countries that have a vision for 10 years ahead, or 20 years ahead, understand that the name of the game will be communications, broadband communications, very fast communications," said Tzvi Harpak, the electric company's senior vice president for logistics.

The technology is known as "fiber to the home," or FTTH. Using fiber optic lines, it can provide connection speeds of 100 megabits to a blazing 1 gigabit per second. Today, the typical broadband user in the developed world connects at five to 10 megabits using older cable and DSL connections.

Oliver Johnson, chief executive of British research firm Point Topic, said FTTH technology is the "gold standard" of the next generation of broadband service. Although cable and DSL lines can be upgraded to higher speeds, FTTH has smoother transmission of data and a much higher upside in terms of speed, he said.

"It's easier to go higher. It's future-proofed," he said.

The added bandwidth could transform the way the Internet is used. Massive video files will be downloaded instantly, opening the door for high-definition and 3D movies to be delivered more easily.

Since the system will have equally fast upload speeds, individuals or businesses will also be able to deliver pictures, videos and other large files. In South Korea, where FTTH lines are common, users rave of the lightning fast downloads and crystal clear Skype connections.

This could mean much-improved videoconferences in the workplace, easy sharing of information in complicated engineering tasks, doctors monitoring their patients or assisting in operations by long distance. It will also likely speed up the migration of information, photos and video from personal computers to the "cloud," making it easy for users to access their information from any Internet connection.

Around the world, decision-makers are reaching the conclusion that faster connections will be essential for economic growth. A number of countries are engaged in a gold rush of sorts as they build new networks with FTTH technology.

"Everyone feels that bandwidth will be this commodity down the road. If you don't have it, you'll be out of luck," said David St. John, spokesman for the FTTH Council, an industry trade group based in the U.S.

FTTH technology was introduced more than a decade ago, but adoption has generally been slow because of its high costs. As costs have gradually come down, particularly in densely populated areas, it has begun to take off. And when new networks are rolled out, it makes more sense to go with the new technology.

According to the council, heavily urbanized South Korea leads the world with just over half of households connected to FTTH lines, followed by Japan and Hong Kong, both at about 40 percent. In the U.S., about 7.1

million homes, or 6.6 percent, have the technology through services like Verizon’s FiOS.

Not surprisingly, South Korea leads the world in average broadband connection speed at 13.8 mbps, followed by Hong Kong and Japan, according to Akamai Technologies Inc.’s closely watched "State of the Internet" report. The U.S. is ranked 16th.

Israel, dominated by DSL and cable broadband services, is No. 28, with an average connection speed of about 4.5 megabits per second. According to Point Topic, 92 percent of Israeli homes have broadband connections, a respectable number but only about 19th in the world.

Despite its small size, Israel is one of the world’s leading high-tech centers.

Israeli companies have created leading products in areas such as security software, instant messaging and e-commerce. Microsoft Corp., Intel Corp. and other technology giants maintain operations here, and Apple Inc. is reportedly planning its first overseas development center in Israel. Akamai itself was co-founded by an Israeli-American.

With so much at stake, it is not surprising the government is backing Israel Electric Corp.’s effort to roll out the fiber-optic network.

"Providing high-quality, fiber-to-the-home bandwidth for consumers all over Israel (especially in peripheral areas) is a national interest as it promotes economic growth, education, provision of government services, social welfare," said Eden Bar-Tal, the director general of Israel’s Communications Ministry.

Despite the relatively late start, Israel is well-positioned to quickly join the world’s leaders. About 92 percent of the 7.8 million people live in urban areas, according to government statistics, making it easier to connect large numbers of people relatively quickly.

The electric company also has a key advantage in being able to build on top of its existing infrastructure of overhead wires. That avoids the costly process of having to dig up existing cables or laying down new wires.

It hopes to have 10 percent of the country wired by next year, and two-thirds of the country covered within seven years.

If Israel can stick to that schedule, it would be "among the leading countries" in terms of deployment, said St. John of the trade council.

Harpak, of the electric company, said IEC is seeking bids from potential partners to help build the network. Companies have until Jan. 31 to submit their business plans.

Under guidelines set by the government, the partner will hold a 51 percent stake in the new company, while the electric company will hold a 49 percent stake. Bidding starts at 300 million shekels, or around $75 million, said Harpak, who is heading the election committee that will choose the new partner.

The election committee will review the proposals and hold an online auction by midyear to select its partner, Harpak said.

IEC is banned from identifying any of the potential suitors, but local media reports have said Telecom Italia SpA, BT Group PLC and local companies Elbit Systems Ltd., Rapac Communication & Infrastructure Ltd. and private equity firm Tamares are all in the running.

The new company is to build the infrastructure, while allowing Internet service providers to actually market the service to consumers.

"There's been quite a lot of interest," said Philippe Guez, Managing Director at Rothschild, the investment bank that is acting as the financial adviser to the election committee. "We believe and hope the government and the Israel Electric Corp. will make the appropriate changes in order to make this wonderful project happen."

Spanish Pirate Party Gathering Ex-Megauploader Lynch Mob To Sue U.S.

If you belong to the group swept up by the FBI s swift shutdown of Megaupload, the Pirate Party wants you to help them sue. The Spanish branch of the Pirate Party announced a platform for persons or organizations affected by the closure to register complaints. The hope is that they can bring these complaints against the US and receive some justice.

The effort is lead by the Spanish Pirates of Catalonia, followed by Pirate Parties International, the UK Pirate Party and others. The argument is that, while the FBI may have been justified in penalizing US copyright infringment, the cost was much greater than the gain since many individuals and organizations legally using the service have lost the use of the archives.

The groups are investigating ways that the US breached the law in other countries. Basically, the complaint is about the US narcissism, and the group wants to register complaints from as many users in different countries as possible. The first hit for the Pirates of Catalonia is a possible violation of Articles 197 and 198 of the Spanish Penal Code, which deals with misappropriation of personal data.

Justice or whipping boy - whichever side of the argument about Megaupload you stand on, the protest wants to fly under the banner of rights outrage:

"Regardless of ideology, or opinions on the legality or morality of those running Megaupload, actions such as the closure of this service cause huge damage to lawful users of the sites and are unacceptable and disproportionate violations of their rights."

Even if the group does get the support it wants, will the US even listen to all these countries? The unapologetic Department of Justice has already said that legitimate users of the Megaupload service will simply have to soldier on without their personal files, pointing out that the cyberlocker warned users about data security even before the US barged in.

Jailbreaking Is Not A Crime

You bought it. You own it. Tell the Copyright Office: let me install

whatever software I want on my phone, tablet, or video game system.

bunnie Huang, author of Hacking the Xbox, is standing with the Electronic Frontier Foundation to defend users' right to jailbreak. Will you sign on to bunnie's letter to show the Copyright Office that users everywhere are demanding the right to jailbreak?

Dear Ms. Pallante,

Whether it's patching a security vulnerability or homebrewing video games and apps, people who own smart phones, tablets, and video game systems are finding inventive ways to use and improve their devices. Often users need to gain full administrative access, through a process known as "jailbreaking," to innovate and take advantage of the device's full potential.

But right now, jailbreaking a device can lead to legal threats. That's a vulnerability in the law: we need you to create a "patch" so users who jailbreak devices won't be at legal risk.

Three years ago, the Copyright Office agreed to create an exemption to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act so that folks could jailbreak their smartphones. But that exemption is about to expire. We need you to renew that exemption and expand it to cover jailbreaking gadgets with similar computation potential. These are all siblings to the PC, yet unlocking their potential as versatile and powerful computers is burdened with legal murkiness.

We need these exemptions to conduct security research on devices to help safeguard everyday users from security threats. Furthermore, users of these products benefit from the flexibility to choose their own operating systems and run independently developed software. We need the law to catch up with how people are using technology.

Jailbreaking is helping to make technology better, more secure, and more flexible. Please defend the rights of users.

Thanks for enabling us to keep technology innovative, secure, and focused on the users.

bunnie Huang
@bunniestudios

Student Orders Terrorism Textbook on Amazon, Gets $400 Bag of Cocaine As A Bonus

All Sophia Stockton wanted from Amazon was a textbook for one of her classes. Little did she know that it was going to be shipped to her with something extra on the side. Leafing through the pages of her new book, she was alarmed when a bag of white powder fell out, which she feared was Anthrax. So imagine her surprise when she found out that the powder was far from being a biological weapon - it was actually $400 worth of cocaine!

Stockton, a junior at the MidAmerica Nazarene University in Kansas, ordered a copy of Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives and Issues from the retailer's website. Upon coming across the curious bag of white powder,

she took it to authorities who immediately examined the substance, and determined it was a Schedule II drug.

The book she received was marked "used," which usually indicates an item is shipping from a third-party Amazon Marketplace reseller. But Stockton says she’s positive the book came directly from the website, and it was even sealed in Amazon packaging when it arrived.

Without an official response from Amazon, we could only guess how a bag of cocaine got in between the pages of a textbook, though authorities are currently investigating its possible sources. We can only hope that no other stashes of illegal substances make their way to unsuspecting buyers in the mean time.

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